

LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 26 APRIL 2021

Members Present: Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Councillor Lynne Doherty, Councillor Alan Macro (Substitute), Councillor Steve Masters, Meradin Peachey, Matt Pearce, Jo Reeves (Substitute) and Councillor Joanne Stewart (Vice-Chairman)

Also Present: Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), Mary Massey (Senior Environmental Health Officer) and Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Nick Carter, Shairoz Claridge, Andy Sharp and Councillor Martha Vickers

PART I

130 Minutes of the previous meeting dated 12 April 2021

The minutes of the previous meeting dated 12 April 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

In response to actions identified in the minutes:

- Jo Reeves confirmed that vaccination data presented related to the entire adult population rather than just those in defined cohorts one to nine.
- Jo Reeves confirmed that vaccine hesitancy amongst certain white European communities had been discussed at the West Berkshire and Berkshire West inequalities meetings. Also, Community United had liaised with the Polish population and would produce a bespoke video to promote take-up. Additional work was ongoing with other communities.
- Matt Pearce did not have specific figures for other hospitals in the area, but indicated that they were experiencing similarly low levels of Covid-related admissions to the Royal Berkshire Hospital. No further data was requested by Members.

131 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were received.

132 Recovery

The Board considered a presentation from Joseph Holmes (Agenda Item 4) concerning Recovery. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The Recovery Strategy was approved in Summer 2020 - key elements delivered included: 'Surviving to Thriving' grants; supporting high streets to reopen; distribution of grants to businesses; setting up lateral flow testing sites and mobile testing; and providing support for schools to help them reopen and provide holiday activities.
- British Academy and Local Government Association research had highlighted that Covid had worsened inequalities.
- Young people had been more affected by loneliness during lockdown than other age groups.

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- There was a strong link between access to green space and people reporting 'very good' general health.
- There was a strong link between economic output and people being able to work from home – West Berkshire had a high GDP per capita and residents had spent 75% less time in the workplace in the first lockdown.
- The British Academy had highlighted nine long-term impacts from Covid-19, which would inform the revised Recovery Strategy.
- LGA surveys showed the level of trust in local authorities had risen significantly during Covid-19.
- Next elements of the Recovery Strategy included:
 - closing the inequality gap;
 - promoting active lifestyles;
 - reshaping town centres (i.e. master planning);
 - building on relationships with local communities;
 - remembering those we have lost / who continue to be impacted by Covid.
- A revised Recovery Strategy would be taken to Executive within the next couple of months. Proposed priorities included:
 - health and social wellbeing;
 - economic recovery and renewal;
 - supporting children and young people (with a focus on the most vulnerable);
 - accelerating delivery of environmental objectives;
 - enhancing communications and community engagement;
 - improving customers' experience; and
 - seizing the positives from the pandemic but not forgetting those we have lost, those whose lives will be changed, and those who provided support during the pandemic.

Councillor Lynne Doherty noted that the priorities identified in June 2020 had remained largely unchanged. She asked if all of the long-term impacts were addressed by the updated Recovery Strategy. Joseph Holmes confirmed that they were. He suggested there was a difficult balance between being sufficiently comprehensive and enabling emerging impacts to be picked up.

Councillor Doherty observed that the Council had surveyed residents last summer to identify the local impacts of the pandemic. She asked if there would be value in repeating the survey. Joseph Holmes indicated that this would be useful and would align with the Communication and Engagement Strategy. He suggested that it would be best to do it once the current lockdown had ended, so people could reflect on what had happened and how things had changed, as well as benefiting from more stability and certainty about the future.

133 Vaccination programme update

The Board considered a presentation from Jo Reeves concerning the Vaccination Programme (Agenda Item 5). Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The latest data was for the period up to 22 April 2021.
- Around 91 percent of the population were captured in the data.
- 14 percent of residents had received a second vaccine dose.
- There had only been a one percent increase in the overall number of residents vaccinated, which was due to reduced vaccine supply.
- Second doses had been prioritised together with first doses for high priority cohorts.

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- Residents aged 44+ were now eligible to receive a first dose.
- Vaccine take-up was lower amongst African and Chinese ethnic groups, which would be addressed through pop-up clinics and targeted information campaigns.
- A campaign had been run to provide reassurance that vaccination during Ramadan did not invalidate fasting.
- Nearly half of at-risk patients who were housebound had received a second vaccine dose.
- Vaccine take up amongst younger, at-risk patients was slightly lower, but social media campaigns were being used to encourage them to come forward.
- Take-up amongst residents of wards with higher levels of deprivation was broadly in line with the rest of West Berkshire.

The Chairman welcomed the high level of take-up overall, the progress that had been made through the various age groups, and the roll-out of the second doses.

Councillor Steve Masters asked about pop-up clinics proposed for Riverside. Jo Reeves reported that community leaders at the West Berkshire Muslim Centre did not feel this was necessary at this time, due to high levels of take-up, so efforts would continue on promotional activity instead.

134 Local contact tracing

The Board considered a presentation from Sean Murphy and Mary Massey concerning Local Contact Tracing (Agenda Item 6). Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- Contract tracing was part of the wider Public Protection Partnership (PPP) response to the pandemic as set out in the Local Outbreak Control Plan.
- West Berkshire became an NHS Test and Trace Partner in November 2020 and was an early adopter of the system.
- A 7-day service was provided by 36 West Berkshire staff.
- The service was managed by the Environmental Health Team, with additional staff at weekends.
- Each shift had a 'Super User' who accessed data from the national system and checked that people had not already been contacted.
- The 'Super User' also monitored the outbreak notification system for workplaces, care homes, schools and other settings.
- The 'Super User' was supported by up to four contact tracers.
- All staff had received comprehensive training.
- Staff had epidemiological / clinical / commissioning / Covid secure compliance and regulatory experience.
- Key skills were communication, interpersonal skills and attention to detail.
- Staff were used to working with residents in difficult / stressful situations.
- As of 21 April, 479 'difficult to contact' cases had been transferred to the local service - 75 percent of these had been successfully contacted, with full contact tracing for 71 percent.
- Cases received self-isolation advice and ongoing NHS contact.
- Contacts could be eligible for financial / non-financial support to assist with isolation.
- The local centre benefitted from: having a local dialling code; local knowledge about communities and places; signposting to local authority support; local intelligence to help minimise onward spread; delivery of duty of care and

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safeguarding of vulnerable people; and helping to inform preparations for surge testing.

- The service would be moving to a new NHS Test and Trace platform, which would require training for staff.
- Under the new system, the Local Contract Tracing service would be able to draw any case from the national database that matched local priorities.
- There had been no significant increase in cases due to easing of lockdown restrictions, but this might change with the move to the next stage in the Covid-19 Roadmap, and increases may occur due to quarantining arrivals and social gatherings in informal settings.

The Chairman asked how the local contact tracing system would link to surge testing for new variants. Mary Massey explained that the PPP had oversight and involvement in a recent surge testing preparation exercise. The PPP had also contributed to policy preparation. She confirmed that variants of concern would be a key priority under the new system since it was important for these cases to fully observe self-isolation, keeping them out of workplaces and other high-risk settings and minimising community transmission.

Councillor Lynne Doherty expressed her thanks to members of the Contract Tracing Team, who were often doing this in addition to their day jobs. She noted that the national system currently passed down cases where they had been unable to make contact and asked if this would still happen under the new system. Mary Massey confirmed that it would. She stated that the new system would allow the local authority to see all cases in West Berkshire and priorities would be determined in consultation with the Public Health Team. She indicated that data would be provided on common exposure locations, including locations visited by people before their symptoms appeared and prior to them being tested, where transmission may have taken place.

Councillor Alan Macro asked if cases would still be contacted by the national system even where the local system had already made contact. Mary Massey confirmed that once a case was in the local system, the national system would only make contact for welfare checks. This was built into the national system and could not be over-ridden.

135 Covid-19 situational report

The Board considered a presentation from Matt Pearce concerning the latest Covid-19 Situational Report (Agenda Item 7). Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- Fewer people were being tested, due in part to the reduction in the prevalence of Covid-19 within the community.
- West Berkshire's figures compared favourably to other local authorities in Berkshire and were better than the South East and England averages.
- 0.3 percent of local test results were positive.
- There were 13.9 cases per 100,000 population (all ages).
- There were 5 cases per 100,000 population (aged 60+).
- There had been 22 Covid cases in West Berkshire in the last 7 days.
- The figures were being monitored closely for any changes due to lockdown restrictions easing.
- No Covid related deaths had been reported in West Berkshire since 2 April.
- The non-Covid-19 death rate was in line with the five-year average for this time of year.

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- Since the start of the pandemic, the all-cause mortality rate had been 17 percent higher than the preceding five-year average, which equated to 248 additional deaths.
- Since the start of the pandemic, 55 percent of deaths occurred in hospital, 33 percent in care homes and 6 percent at home. However, at the start of the pandemic, around 50 percent of deaths were in care homes.
- There had been no new admissions for Covid-19 patients to Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust (RBFT) hospitals on 11 April.
- On 13 April, there were 8 Covid-19 patients in RBFT hospitals, of whom 1 was on mechanical ventilation.
- The highest weekly rates of Covid-19 were currently amongst people aged 44-49 (39 per 100,000 population). There were no cases for adults aged 55+, which suggested the vaccination programme was working.
- More information was available on the Berkshire Public Health website: <https://www.berkshirepublichealth.co.uk>.

The Chairman agreed that the vaccine programme appeared to be having the desired effect in reducing cases and hospitalisations amongst the elderly.

Matt Pearce highlighted some research, which suggested that the vaccination programme also reduced transmissibility, and there were clear benefits for those groups most impacted by the pandemic to date. However, he urged caution, since just under half the population was still to be vaccinated.

136 Communications update

The Board considered a presentation from Martin Dunscombe on the Communications Update (Agenda Item 8). Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- Communications had focused on community testing, including the launch of pharmacy collect service and the mobile community collect service across 25 towns and villages in West Berkshire.
- Information had been updated on the website and in messages pushed out to the local community to ensure that residents were clear about the community testing options available.
- A series of newspapers ads were planned to encourage people to consider community testing and let them know how they could access it.
- Content had also gone out through the Penny Post and the Council's own newsletter.
- Other health issues promoted in the last fortnight included:
 - the importance of wearing face masks in addition to face visors, since visors on their own were not effective at preventing the spread of Covid (an infographic had been prepared to support this);
 - a campaign around parks and open spaces to ensure that people met up safely and looked after their local environment;
 - messages to reinforce Government guidelines around safe behaviours in hospitality settings, which highlighted the impacts of unsafe behaviours on other customers.
- The Council had continued to produce e-bulletins for residents.
- A new [e-book](#) had been produced, which looked back at community's response to Covid-19, which showed how much had been achieved in the last year – the Council was looking to produce physical copies for distribution through libraries, other Council buildings and community testing centres.

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- The above messages had been shared on social media, and a Facebook Live event had been held around the Recovery Strategy, including a question and answer session.
- A campaign had also been run to ensure the Muslim community was aware they could still have their vaccinations throughout Ramadan.
- Future work would focus on:
 - promoting changes under Step 3 of the Covid Roadmap, with further easing of restrictions planned for 17 June;
 - supporting the new national vaccine campaign aimed at younger age groups;
 - communicating changes to the community testing programme;
 - promoting the hands, face, space and fresh air message;
 - continuing to promote vaccine take-up locally.

Members had no questions concerning this item.

137 Future agenda items

The Chairman noted that Sean Murphy had proposed an item on public events and gatherings.

Members were invited to email the clerk and copy in the Chairman with any further suggestions for future agenda items.

138 Any other business

The Chairman noted that the next meeting would be on 10 May, which would be after the expiry of the emergency regulations permitting virtual meetings on 7 May. He explained that a case had been presented to the High Court to allow virtual meetings to continue and a judgement was awaited. He noted that subject to the High Court decision, the next meeting may be a physical meeting in the Council Chamber with social distancing, or some sort of hybrid meeting. He confirmed that future meetings would still be broadcast.

Councillor Lynne Doherty noted that the LOEB was not a decision-making body and wondered if the meeting could still be held virtually. The Chairman indicated that this may be possible, but suggested that it may also be an opportunity to test the Council's new systems. He confirmed that he was meeting with officers to discuss future meeting arrangements on 27 April and would let Members know the outcome of that meeting.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.03 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature